

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

NO. 1049

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY MORNING, MAY 5, 1872,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"For yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities."
Psalm 141:5.*

THIS is a very difficult passage in the original, and it is hard to fix its meaning with absolute certainty. However, it is no business of mine, at this present, to go into the various interpretations which have been given, for I am aiming at something else, I am, for my immediate purpose, quite content with the authorized version. The meaning given to the passage by our translators is this, David says, although the righteous man should rebuke him most sternly so as to smite his conscience, and bring before him his wrong-doing, and even though he should do this with considerable severity, yet he would not be displeased with him, but would love him all the better, and be thankful to him for having acted so faithfully, and he would prove his love by continuing to pray for his reprover, should the good man at any time be overtaken by calamity. David would always give his honest censor a warm place in his prayers.

Now, if this is the meaning, and I think it is, it shows us that David was in the habit of praying for the saints, for if he had not been, he would not have said that even in their calamities his prayers should go up for them. He had made it his daily custom to bring before his God in his private prayers the names of God's righteous ones, or else, I say, he would not have made the remark that even if some of them should rebuke him and reprove him sternly, he still would continue to pray for them.

Our subject this morning shall be the high duty of intercession, a duty all too little regarded in these days. We shall speak upon it, first, as the text would lead us to do, in reference to *saints*, and, secondly, we shall urge it upon you on behalf of *sinner*s.

I. First, then, we have to speak upon the duty of INTERCESSION FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

To arrange our thoughts in some order we will take for our first keynote the word *obligation*. It is incumbent upon every child of God to pray for the rest of the sacred family. Does not nature itself teach us this? I mean not the old nature, but the new nature created within us by the Holy Spirit. Did you not find, my brethren, as soon as you were yourselves possessors of divine life that you began without any exhortation to pray for others? Your very first believing cries began with, "*Our Father which art in heaven*," and so included others besides yourself.

Among the earliest prayers which a renewed heart offers will be one for the man through whose agency it was brought to Jesus. No new convert forgets to pray for the minister who was the instrument of his conversion. The newly delivered soul also pleads for others who are still in the deplorable condition from which grace has enabled it to escape. "You have brought my soul out of prison, Lord, set my fellow-captives free. In Your loving-kindness enable others to taste the sweetness of Your Salvation."

Then the Christian people who have at any time conversed with the convert, who have ministered to his comfort or instruction, will be sure to obtain a share in his prayers, for a renewed heart is a tenderly grateful heart, and a man is not born-again from above who feels no thankfulness to earnest friends below. Set a bird free from a cage, and it will sing you its thanks as it speeds forth into the air, even thus, if you are enabled to open the prison doors of bonded spirits, they will repay your loving efforts with prayer.

I say it is a natural instinct of the new-born believer to begin to intercede for others, and this instinct continues with him throughout his life. It is one of the things that he must do, it is a pleasure for him to do it, and it would be impossible for him to utterly cease from it, for the indwelling Spirit in his bosom makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

And, brethren, as it is an instinct of the heaven born nature, so it is a law of the elect household. The saints in their due order may be described as “praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” Every believer has a watchman’s place appointed him in the matter of prayer, and he is bound not to be silent, but to give the Lord no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. We are all equally bound to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, and our prosperity is made to hinge upon it. The new commandment which the Lord has given us, in which He bids us, “Love one another,” necessitates our praying for each other.

How shall a man claim that he loves his brother if he never intercedes with God for him? Can I live continually with my fellow-believers and see their sorrows, and never cry to God on their behalf? Can I observe their poverty, their tribulation, their temptation, their heaviness of heart, and yet forget them in my supplications? Can I see their work of faith and labor of love, and never implore a blessing upon them? Can I wrap up myself within myself, and be indifferent to the case of those who are my brethren in Christ Jesus? Impossible. I must belong to some other family than that of God, for in the family of love, common sympathy leads to constant intercession.

God forbid that we should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for our brethren. Every bee in the hive of the church should bring in its own share of this honey to the common store. As all the rootlets of a tree traverse the earth in search of nutriment, and all suck in provision for the benefit of all, so should each believer with open mouth of prayer search out and drink in spiritual blessings for the benefit of the whole church. Forget not then, my brethren, the sweet obligation under which you are laid by your relationship to the saints, and their ever blessed Lord.

Moreover, beloved, we recognize a vital union among believers, a oneness of a very intimate kind. We are not barely brethren, but we are “Members of the same body.” Christ is the head of His mystical body, the church, and we are all members of His body. Now, as in the human frame each separate limb, member, organ, vein, nerve, is needful to the whole, so in the church each believer is necessary to the rest, and the rest are needful to him. We may not be able to show what particular mischief would be done to the arm by an injury to the knee, yet, rest assured there would be a sympathetic suffering. No single cell or sac within the whole system can be out of order without in some degree affecting all the rest of the frame.

Even so, God has made us dependent upon one another, far more than we imagine. In the church-unity every man contributes to the health or to the disease of the whole corporation, nor can he avoid so doing. No man lives to himself in the church of God, and no man dies to himself. When a believer grows in grace, he is enriched not for himself alone, the Christian community has increased its spiritual wealth by his gains. When, on the other hand, a man declines in divine things, and so becomes poor and feeble, it is not to himself alone that the injury occurs, but in a measure the church is impoverished, weakened, and injured.

O brethren, since this is the case, let us discharge abundantly the duties which we owe to the body of which we form a part, and in the delightful exercise of supplication let us abound more and more. Intercession should throb like a pulse through the whole body, causing every living member to feel the sacred impulse. Intercession is one of the least things which we can do, and yet it is one of the greatest, let us not be slack in it. A prayerless church member is a hindrance, he is in the body like a rotting bone, or a decayed tooth, and, ere long, since he does not contribute to the benefit of his brethren, he will become a danger and a sorrow to them. Brethren, let it not be so with any one of you.

Besides, brethren, if an argument were needed to touch our hearts, it is not far to find. We ourselves owe much to the prayers of others. Many Christians can trace their conversion to their mother’s prayers which went up to heaven for them, when as yet their infant tongues could not pronounce the Savior’s

name. A mother brought them to Jesus, and besought Him to lay His hands on them and bless them. Many of you owe your conversion to the pleadings of Sabbath school teachers, or to the supplications of ministers, or to earnest individual Christians who were led to intercede for you. Now, if by the way of prayer you have received a blessing, show your gratitude by praying for others. Endeavor to confer the blessing in the same way as you have received it. For my own self personally, I say this morning that no man can do me a truer kindness in this world than to pray for me. I reckon, brethren, that the more of prayers I have the wealthier I am in real riches, in that form of personal estate which is better than gold and silver.

An old Puritan remarks that when a man thrives in business, he sets many hands to work for him, and, says he, when a man grows in usefulness he brings many souls to pray for him, and so his business is carried on. The greater the expenditure of grace in the case of the Lord's servant, the more he needs intercessory help from all his brethren and sisters that he may be able to carry on his work under the divine blessing. I am under bonds, my brethren, to pray for you, since I know that many of you continually besiege the throne of grace on my behalf. I put the argument, therefore, to you, if you have received blessings through the intercession of saints, would you not be ungrateful indeed if you did not intercede for others in return?

Did a mother's prayers bring you to Christ? Then, dear young mother, send up your entreaties to the Lord for your dear little one. Did a father's supplications lead to your salvation? Then, young man, hold up your father with your constant prayers, and so enrich his latter days. Freely you have received, freely give. The soil fertilized by the dew gives back its harvest, do you also make a fair return to the church which has been the channel of blessing to you. It is not, therefore, a matter of choice with us, today, whether we shall pray for our brethren in Christ or not.

Beloved brethren, you are not alive unto God, you have not the instincts of the new life if you do not intercede for the household of faith. You have not the love which is of God, which is the sure sign of regeneration, if you forget intercession. You are unmindful of the debt you owe, and you are acting unworthily of your professed union with the church of Christ, if intercession be neglected by you. As with a trumpet call, I would arouse you, my brethren and sisters, to effectual earnest prayer for the family of the living God.

Let us change our watchword now from obligation to *honor*. What an honor it is to be permitted to pray for the saints! For, observe, this brings us into the closest conceivable fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We cannot assist in providing atonement for human sin, "It is finished," said the Savior, and finished it is. In that work we can have no fellowship except as we receive of its results, for "He has trodden the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with him." In preaching the Gospel today, we are exercising an office in which our Lord Jesus has now no share, the Holy Spirit helps us, but the man Christ Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, and His voice is not heard proclaiming the glad tidings.

Therefore, in some respects, we have diverse occupations and exercise different offices, but, in the business of intercession we are one, at this very moment, our Lord is pleading before the throne, and when we intercede for His people, we are doing precisely the same. We, in praying for the saints, have actual present fellowship with our great High Priest who intercedes within the veil. I say again, if I preach today, Christ is not preaching, but if I pray, my voice harmonizes with His. If I pray for the brethren, I remember that He stands before the throne of glory with the breastplate on, having the names of all His chosen glittering there upon its precious stones.

Is it not then a delightful thing to be partakers with the Son of God in the ministry of intercession? In this service He has made us priests unto our God. He is the great Angel, with the golden censor, and the smoke of the incense which He offers ascends with the prayers of the saints before the Lord. Beloved, if you would be conformed in service to the Lord Jesus, the opportunity is ready to your hand, be much in intercession for the saints.

And, what an honor it is that we, who so lately were beggars for ourselves at mercy's door, are now received so much into royal favor that we may venture to speak a word in the king's ear for others. It was sovereign mercy which allowed us to say, "Have mercy upon me!" but what condescension is this which has taken us into such nearness with itself that now we can come to the Lord and say, "I would fain speak a word with You for a brother of mine, I would venture to ask bounties at Your hands, my Father, for a sister who needs compassion."

See, my brethren, how eminently you are promoted, you are ordained to the high office of "The King's remembrancers," to inquire of Him concerning the good things of His covenant. You are constituted royal almoners for the King of kings, He sets before you His open treasury and bids you ask what you will.

O priceless grace, if you, O believer, know how to ask by faith, you may hand out to your brethren wealth more precious than the gold of Ophir, for intercession is the key of the ivory palaces wherein are contained the boundless treasures of God. Saints in intercession reach a place where angels cannot stand. Those holy beings rejoice over penitent sinners, but we do not read of their being admitted as suppliants for the saints. Yet we, imperfect as we are, have this favor, we are permitted to open our mouth before the Lord for the sick and for the tried, for the troubled and for the downcast, with the assurance that whatsoever we shall ask in prayer believing we shall receive. In this thing great honor is put upon you.

Brethren, avail yourselves of this honor. I know very well if Her Majesty should give a permission to any one of you to call at the palace, and to ask what you would for your friends, you would not neglect the opportunity. Why, in these days, if a man thinks he has the ear of a member of Parliament, or somebody in power, it is not often that he neglects the opportunity of speaking for his cousin or his son who desires an office, where there is little to do and much to receive.

All over the world place-hunters are in abundance, men of influence, having the ear of the authorities, are always pressed to make all possible use thereof. And yet, I have to stand here this morning and urge you, dear brethren, who have the ear of God, to exercise your choice prerogative. You have promises from God of the granting of your request, and many are saying, "I would be spoken for unto the king," pray be not slow to help. Use the liberty which your Prince has given you and plead for your brethren.

If there be no other who needs your prayers, I eagerly ask for a place in them. "Brethren, pray for us," said an apostle, how much more may I say it. Having to minister daily in holy things, our responsibilities and needs are very great, do not, therefore, forget us when it is well with you. Say a kind thing unto the Prince for His servants and ask Him to grant us more of His grace.

We will change the word now from honor to *excellence*. Intercessory prayer is a most excellent thing, for first, it benefits those who use it. I know you desire, beloved, to be of real service in the church of God. I trust we have no members of this church who are satisfied to have their names in the book, and to attend services, and to feel that all is done when this is done. No, you wish to be really helpful and to bring glory to God. Well, then, I urge upon you for this end the excellence of intercessory prayer.

First, brethren, it will suggest to you to know your brethren. You cannot pray well for those you know nothing about. You will not, therefore, go in and out of the assembly not knowing the person who sits next to you in the pew, but you will inquire how the brethren fare, and, when you hear of any one being in distress of mind, or body, or estate, you will be ready to take notice of that, in order that you may offer prayer on his account, and then there will be in you a sympathetic knowledge of your brethren.

Paul tells us to know them that labor among us and are over us in the Lord! and I wish all church members did know more of their pastor's struggles, and sorrows, and joys, that they might have more sympathy with him, and the same is true of the rest of the brethren, the more you know and sympathize the better will your prayer be, and because you will need to know, in order to intercede, therefore, I call intercession an excellent exercise.

Earnest intercession will be sure to bring love with it. I do not believe you can hate a man for whom you habitually pray. If you dislike any brother Christian, pray for him doubly, not only for his sake, but for your own, that you may be cured of prejudice and saved from all unkind feeling. Remember the old story of the man who waited on his pastor to tell him that he did not enjoy his preaching. The minister wisely said, "My dear brother, before we talk that matter over, let us pray together," and, after they had both prayed, the complainant found he had nothing to say except to confess that he himself had been very negligent in prayer for his pastor, and he laid his not profiting to that account.

I ascribe want of brotherly love to the decline of intercessory prayer. Pray for one another earnestly, habitually, fervently, and you will knit your hearts together in love as the heart of one man. This is the cement of fair colors in which the stones of the church should be laid if they are to be compact together.

Dear brethren, when you pray for one another, not only will your sympathy and love grow, but you will have kinder judgments concerning one another. We always judge leniently those for whom we intercede. If a talebearer represents my brother in a very black light, my love makes me feel sure that he is mistaken. Did I not pray for him this morning, and how can I hear him condemned? If I am compelled to believe that he is guilty I am very sorry, but I will not be angry with him, but will pray the Lord to forgive and restore him, remembering myself also lest I be tempted.

We think our children beautiful because they are our own, and have a place in our heart, and in the same way we are quick to perceive any admirable traits of character which may exist in those for whom we intercede, and we are willing to suggest extenuations for the failings of their dispositions. Prayer is a wondrous blender of hearts and a mighty creator of love.

Intercessory prayer is of much efficacy in fostering watchfulness. Suppose that you, as a member of this church, are brought into contact with backsliders and are led to seek their restoration, your prayers for their recovery will naturally lead you to pray, "Lord, preserve me from this evil, keep me from backsliding, preserve me from becoming cold and indifferent as these brethren have done."

If we meet with professed Christians who have fallen into drunkenness, and we are earnest in pleading with the Lord to rescue them from that horrible ditch, our own souls are made to loathe the sin and to stand upon its watch tower against it. If we perceive that two brethren have disagreed and cannot be brought into a state of peace, if we pray to God that unity may be restored between them, we are led also to ask that we may be of a gentle and quiet spirit, that we may not cause strife, and that if we have caused it at any time we may be prepared to confess the wrong and amend it. And thus the objects of our prayerful solicitude become beacons to us.

If you observe others with captious eye, censure them eagerly, and go from house to house to spread the ill-savor industriously, your unhallowed course of action will breed self-righteousness in yourself, but, if you go to the Lord with sorrow about all misdeeds of brethren, and persistently seek the restoration of the erring, you will foster in your own heart tenderness of feeling and watchfulness against sin. Those who supplicate much for others will frequently find on their own lips the prayer, "Search me, O God, and try me, and know my ways, see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

I cannot stay to tell you what other excellent things there are wrapped up in this exercise of intercession, but I am persuaded it is one of the holiest, healthiest, and most heavenly exercises in which a devout man can possibly be occupied.

Do you not think, dear brethren, that if we were each one required upon the spot to give an account of his attention to this excellent duty, we should most of us need to be ashamed? May I venture to put the question to every Christian here, have *you* rendered to God and His church your fair proportion of intercessory prayer? We have not interceded too much, I am certain, for of this salt it may be said, "Salt without prescribing how much." No man prays too much for his fellow man. Have we prayed enough? I give you space, and make a pause, in which you may put the question.

I will give you my own answer. I am clear as to my duty to this church in the matter of preaching, for I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God. If I could learn to preach better I would

gladly do so. I am conscious of my failures, but I have served you heartily and faithfully before God in this pulpit. But I cannot say so of my intercessions. I have many confessions to make to God of shortcomings in that department, and I am afraid that a great number of my fellow-workers here must plead guilty to the same indictment. You have never missed your class on Sunday afternoon yet, you are always at your work on time, with the Scripture lesson well studied, that is right, but, dear brother, do you always pray the lesson into your soul? Dear sister, have you made a habit of praying for the girls under your care, one by one, with intense fervor? I do not accuse, but I ask you to look into your own soul, for the fault is not a trivial one, but causes ourselves and the church no little damage.

Elders and deacons of this church, are you clear in the matter of intercession? Some men among us may be without blame in this business, but I am afraid that the most of us have attended to other duties far beyond the proportion in which we have attended to this. We have prayed in public at the prayer meetings, and we have not forgotten supplication for the saints at the family altar, neither, I trust, is it unknown in our private devotions, but still, if we had prayed for our brethren ten times as much, or even a hundred times as much, we should not have gone too far.

We stand up sometimes on the public platform, and we charge the church of God with growing cold, let us ask ourselves the question, have we by our prayers added to her heat? Have we pleaded for her revival?

We find fault with the Missionary Societies because such slender results are apparent. Do we pray for missions as we should? I hear a mournful complaint about the present and rising race of preachers, have we interceded for students, and for pastors, as we should? I hear people speak of Christians as either worldly, superficial or proud. Have you prayed them out of their worldliness and pride? May it not be that you would have done far better if you had prayed for them than found fault with them? Ay, and may not the errors you see in them be, in a considerable measure, traceable to the neglect of the office of intercession by yourself?

Oh, let us have done with murmuring and complaining, criticisms and finding fault, and take the whole of it up to the mercy seat, for if half the breath that is vainly spent in censorious complaints were turned into intercession, there would be much more holiness in the church.

Now, I must come to the text again, while I give you another word, and that is *extent*. David says in the text, "Yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities," and his meaning is this, if any of the saints of God should by their fidelity to his soul displease him, he would nevertheless pray for them. Brethren, we are not to confine our prayers to those who please us in their mode of addressing us, but we are to pray lovingly for those who are too sharp, too harsh, too cutting in their remarks. Suppose they should be so severe as to grieve our spirits, suppose their rebukes appear to be uncalled for, injurious and unjust, we are still bound to pray for them.

David, in the text, seems to say that, let the righteous do what they might with him, he would still pray for them in their calamities, and I urge you, my brethren, if there is any member of this church who has treated you unkindly, revenge yourself upon him by loving him ten times more than ever you did, and praying for him more constantly and more earnestly.

If some brother has crushed your spirit and wounded you, so that to think of him causes you pain, never mind, the best cure for the wound is to go to God in prayer and pour out your soul for him, ask the Lord to give him a great blessing and to make him a better Christian, to fill him full of divine love, and then, when you see him improved, you will either come to think that you made a mistake in judging what he said, and took wrongly what he meant to do you good, or else you will find that he will come to you and will say, "I was in the wrong, my brother," or, if he does not confess that in words, he will by extra kindness to you acknowledge it in his deeds.

And, brethren, if ever we find a fellow Christian in a calamity, then we are to pray for him doubly. Men of the world leave their companions when they get into trouble, as the herd leave the wounded deer. We have many friends when all goes well, we have very few when the evil days are lowering. But, with Christians it should not be so, we should be faithful friends, we ought to be more kind to those who

become poor than we are to others, and, if we meet with a fellow Christian who has lost his comfort, and is desponding, though his society may not be very pleasant, but may even have a depressing influence upon ourselves, we should pray for him more, and try to lift him out of the Slough of Despond.

Especially if a brother in Christ should be slandered we are bound to stand by him. Too many follow the bad habit of getting right out of the way of a man who is traduced. Somebody has thrown a handful of mud at a professed Christian, let us clear the coast, for the mud may light upon us too. So say cowards, but so say not we. No, brother, if you belong to the army of Immanuel, and our persecuted brother has done no wrong, let us stand or fall by him. Let us never desert a comrade.

If the world says, "Down with him! Down with him! Down with him!" we will rush like the old Greek hero to the rescue, and hold our shield over the fallen one, fighting for him till he can get up again, for one of these days we may be down too, and we may want a brother soldier to cover us from the enemy. Let us pray our brethren out of their troubles and not desert them, and if that prayer should be long before it gets an answer, let us persevere in persistence, saying with David, "Yet my prayer shall be in their calamities."

I shall say no more upon this matter of intercession for the saints, but shall leave it before the eternal throne, and with your own consciences. I beseech you, unless you be traitors to Christ, if you be members of the true unity, if your souls are knit together by the Holy Ghost, wrestle much for one another, and do not let the covenant angel go till a blessing shall come to the whole house of God, and then flow into the world at large.

II. Now, secondly, the high office of intercession FOR SINNERS.

Upon this I shall speak briefly, but, I trust, earnestly. As a church we have a crown, and for many years we have held it, but, I would use the language of Christ in the Book of the Revelation, when speaking to one of the churches, He says, "Hold fast that you have, that no man take your crown." Now, what has been our crown as a church? It has not been our wealth, for in that we do not excel. It has not been our learning, we do not make any show of it. It has not been our tasteful services, the beauty of our music, or the sweetness of our chanting. No, we do not care about such things, but cultivate simplicity.

Our crown has been this one thing, that if there has been a church in Christendom which has given itself to winning souls, this church has done so. Our ministry has aimed always at this, the plucking of the brands from burning, the bringing of sinners out of darkness into marvelous light, and, I do you nothing but simple justice, my brethren, when I say, that by far the larger part of this church is really alive for soul-winning. It does my heart good to meet with divers knots of brethren among you who everywhere about this city are working away unostentatiously but successfully in bringing souls to Christ. I hope it always will be so.

Hold fast, O church, what you have, that no man takes your crown. Let it always be our joy and glory that God gives us spiritual children, and souls are born to Him. Now, if we desire to do this, and I am sure we do, but we must look more to intercession for the souls of the unconverted.

Pray first, for this is the most essential thing to do. What can you and I alone do in the conversion of a man? We cannot change his heart, we cannot put life into him—we might as well think to create a soul within the ribs of death. It is God's work to regenerate souls. What then? If I am to be His instrument in doing it, my very first action must be to fall on my knees and pray, "O God, work with me."

You are going to your Sunday school this afternoon, or you are off to your street preaching, now, if *you* could do the work, I would not urge you to waste time in asking God to do what you could do alone; but, as you are utterly powerless to win a single soul to Jesus without the Spirit of God, let your first action be to pray, "O power divine, come and clothe me! O tongue of fire, be given to me, and sacred, rushing, mighty wind, come forth to breathe life upon dead souls!" Prayer is the most essential thing in turning sinners from the error of their ways.

Then, intercessory prayer will fit you for becoming God's instrument. If I pray for a person's conversion, especially if I single out some individual, then my heart gets warmed into love to that individual, as I think over his position and condition in prayer. Very well, that instructs me, and helps

me to deal out the proper word to him when I come near to him. I am like a surgeon, who, coming to a case where he has to use the lancet, knows exactly where every bone is, and also what part has been injured. My prayer has given me a diagnosis of the man's state. I have looked it through and considered it in my petitions, and when I come practically to work upon him, I shall be wise, by the Spirit of God to do the right thing, and in the right way. If we wished to send a man to college to make him a good helper to troubled hearts, we would send him to the college of all-prayer, for intercession is the mode to become wise in winning souls.

And, brethren, prayer will have this effect upon you that you will go to work hopefully. It is a very horrible thing to think of persons being buried alive, put underground by their friends in their coffins while yet there was breath in their bodies. Let us mind that we never bury a soul alive—I am afraid we are in the habit of doing it. We judge of such a one that he will never be converted, it is a case where all effort would be useless. We think of another person that he is so abandoned, we may very well give him up and attend to more hopeful cases. In all this we are wrong, since we have no right to sign a soul's death warrant, or to say to the grace of God "Hitherto can you come but no further." Believe that as long as a man lives in this world there are possibilities of grace for him. Take him in your arms before God in prayer, and when you begin to pray for him you will feel that there is hope, and you will afterwards converse with him in a hopeful and perhaps believing manner.

I do not believe a man was ever saved by another one talking to him in a tone of despair, but the cheerful utterance of hopeful love wins its way. Believe that the hard heart may be broken, the blasphemer's tongue cleansed, the persecutor's mind changed, and that the rebel may yet obey Christ crucified, and become a bright star in the heaven of God. Dear brethren, I pray you then since the power is of God, and since intercession will make you fit to be used by God, and since also it will give you great hopefulness with regard to those you deal with, exercise yourselves much more than ever in intercessory prayer.

This is a work in which all of you can aid. If I came to you this morning and said, "Brothers and sisters, the Lord's cause requires money," I know from long experience, that you would do your best, but there are some who would be compelled to reply, "The necessities of my family do not permit my doing anything in that direction." But, when we ask for intercession, no Christian can say, "I cannot plead with God." If I were to press upon you at this moment the want of more public preaching, many of my congregation would be justly excused, for they are slow of speech and without gifts of utterance. But, O brethren and sisters, when it comes to interceding you can all fulfill the office, and by so doing you can have a share in all the great works of the church.

I have heard of a holy woman who used to say, "I cannot preach but I can help my minister to do it by my prayers, therefore, whenever I see him come into the pulpit, I will pray that God will bless his word, and so I shall have a share in what he does." When you hear of a missionary working anywhere abroad pray for him, and then you will become his co-worker.

Beloved, some of you are often sickly in body, and during the weary night you get but little sleep—do you know why the Lord keeps you awake? It is that while others of us are sleeping you may be praying for us. God must have some to keep the night watches, He determines that a guard of prayer shall be set around His church all day and all night long—you are the sentries of the night watches. You cannot do anything else, but you can pray, and by praying you can obtain a share in the noblest works of the church.

Now mark, David by implication tells us that some of those we pray for may perhaps, not care for our prayers, and they may come into great calamities through their sins, then is our time when we should be yet more earnest in intercession for them. If I have spoken to an ungodly man for many years, and he has ridiculed all I have said, then I will resolve within myself, "I will never leave off praying for him. Perhaps one of these days I shall find him sick, and then he will ask for the prayers he now rejects. Perhaps I shall find him with a broken heart, and then the words he now jests at will be very sweet to his taste."

You who seek after souls must know how to keep up the chase, those who are short of breath in soul-winning will never be successful. Follow them up! Follow them up! Follow them to the gates of the grave. If they are not saved after twenty years of prayer, follow them up to the gates of hell! If they once pass those gates your prayers are unallowable and unavailing, but to the very verge of the infernal pit follow them, follow them with your prayers. If they will not hear you speak, they cannot prevent your praying. Do they jest at your exhortations? They cannot disturb you at your prayers, for they do not know when you offer them. Are they far away so that you cannot reach them? Your prayers can reach them, you can still bless them. Have they declared that they will never listen to you again, nor see your face? Never mind, God has a voice which they must hear—speak you to Him, and He will make them feel. Though they now treat you spitefully, rendering evil for your good, follow them, follow them, follow them with your prayers, never let them perish for want of your supplications.

The time may come when those who have been longest in yielding their hearts to Christ will repay us a thousand-fold for all the efforts and supplications we may put forth. I have sometimes seen a great sinner, when he is saved, become of as much use as twenty ordinary converts, for in proportion as he was hard to win, he has become useful when won. We do not expect that we shall get Sauls every day made into Pauls, but when it is so, then the church is rich indeed, for one Paul is worth a thousand ordinary believers. These deep sea pearls are precious. These difficult cases may turn out to be Pauls, therefore, be instant in season and out of season, praying for them till they are brought to Christ.

The one thing I desire this morning is that my dear brothers and sisters in Christ should pledge themselves to be more persistent in prayer for sinners all around us. Like Abraham, a great city is before us, let us plead for it, like Moses, we dwell among a sinful people, let us stand in the gap for them. I charge every member of this church, by his fealty to God, if indeed he is not a liar in the profession that he has made, to pray persistently for the ungodly, that they may be brought to Jesus. Plead with JEHOVAH, plead, He loves your prayers, your intercessions are like the sweet incense upon the golden altar.

Plead with Him, and you shall live to see a reward for your pleadings in the conversion of the sons of men. Go home and make your children the special objects of this afternoon's cries, implore the Lord to save your husbands or your wives, your kinsfolk, and your nearest neighbors. Implore a blessing upon the seat-holders and hearers of this congregation who remain unregenerate, then take your streets, take the district in which you live, and entreat a gracious visitation—you shall never lack for persons to pray for, therefore, continue in supplication.

It was but a few days ago I saw four husbands who were converted to God, but their wives were left outside the church, and those four brethren, probably all here this morning, met together in prayer for their wives' conversion, and on the first communion Sabbath of last month the four wives were brought in in answer to the prayers of the four husbands.

Anything is possible, everything is possible to him that believes. God help us to believe and to intercede, and then may He send His benediction, for Christ's sake. Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.